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Population distribution, urbanization and internal migration

(Chapter IX of the draft programme of action
of the Conference)

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(Netherlands) (Working Group II), on the basis of
negotiations held on document A/CONF.171/PC/5

Chapter IX

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, URBANIZATION AND INTERNAL MIGRATION

A. Population distribution and sustainable development

Basis for action

9.1. In the early 1990s, approximately half of the Governments in the world, mostly those of developing countries, considered the patterns of population distribution in their territories to be unsatisfactory and wished to modify them. A key issue was the rapid growth of urban areas, which are expected to house more than half of the world population by 2005. Consequently, attention has mostly been paid to rural-urban migration, although rural-rural and urban-urban migration are in fact the dominant forms of spatial mobility in many countries. The process of urbanization is an intrinsic dimension of economic and social development and, in consequence, both developed and developing countries are going through the process of shifting from predominantly rural to predominantly urban societies. For individuals, migration is often a rational and dynamic effort to seek new opportunities in life. Cities are centres of economic growth, providing the impetus for socio-economic innovation and change. However, migration is also prompted by push factors, such as inequitable allocation of development resources, adoption of inappropriate technologies and lack of access to available land. The alarming consequences of urbanization visible in many countries are related to its rapid pace, to which Governments have been unable to respond with their current management capacities and practices. Even in developing countries, however, there are already signs of a changing pattern of population distribution, in the sense that the trend towards concentration in a few large cities is giving way to a more widespread distribution in medium-sized urban centres. This movement is also found in some developed countries, with people indicating preference for living in smaller places. Effective population distribution policies are those that, while respecting the right of individuals to live and work in the community of their choice, take into account the effects of development strategies on population distribution. Urbanization has profound implications for individuals' livelihood, way of life and values. At the same time, migration has economic, social and environmental implications - both positive and negative - for the places of origin and destination.

Objectives

9.2. The objectives are:

(a) To foster a more balanced spatial distribution of the population by promoting in an integrated manner the equitable and ecologically sustainable development of major sending and receiving areas, with particular emphasis on the promotion of economic, social and gender equity based on respect for human rights, especially the right to development;

(b) To reduce the role of the various push factors as they relate to migration flows.

Actions

9.3. Governments formulating population distribution policies should ensure that the objectives and goals of those policies are consistent with other development goals, policies, and basic human rights. Governments, assisted by interested local, regional and intergovernmental agencies, should assess on a regular basis how the consequences of their economic and environmental policies, sectoral priorities, infrastructure investment, and balance of resources among regional, central, provincial and local authorities influence population distribution and internal migration, both permanent and temporary.

9.4. In order to achieve a balanced spatial distribution of production employment and population, countries should adopt sustainable regional development strategies and strategies for the encouragement of urban consolidation, the growth of small or medium-sized urban centres and the sustainable development of rural areas, including the adoption of labour-intensive projects, training for non-farming jobs for youth and effective transport and communication systems. To create an enabling context for local development, including the provision of services, Governments should consider decentralizing their administrative systems. This also involves giving expenditure responsibility and the right to raise revenue to regional, district and local authorities. While vast improvements to the urban infrastructure and environmental strategies are essential in many developing countries to provide a healthy environment for urban residents, similar activities should also be pursued in rural areas.

9.4.bis To reduce urban bias and isolated rural development, Governments should examine the feasibility of providing incentives to encourage the redistribution and relocation of industries and businesses from urban to rural areas and to encourage the establishment of new businesses, industrial units and income-generating projects in the rural areas.

9.5. Governments wishing to create alternatives to out-migration from rural areas should establish the preconditions for development in rural areas, actively support access to land ownership or use and access to water resources, especially for family units, make and encourage investments to enhance rural productivity, improve rural infrastructure and social services and facilitate the establishment of credit, production and marketing cooperatives and other grass-roots organizations that give people greater control over resources and improve their livelihoods. Particular attention is needed to ensure that these opportunities are also made available to migrants' families remaining in the areas of origin.

9.5.bis Governments should pursue development strategies offering tangible benefits to investors in rural areas and to rural producers. Governments should also seek to reduce restrictions on international trade in agricultural products.

9.5.ter Governments should strengthen their capacities to respond to the pressures caused by rapid urbanization by revising and reorienting the agencies and mechanisms for urban management as necessary and ensuring the wide participation of all population groups in planning and decision-making on local

development. Particular attention should be paid to land management in order to ensure economical land use, protect fragile ecosystems and facilitate the access of the poor to land in both urban and rural areas.

9.6. Countries are urged to recognize that the lands of indigenous people and their communities should be protected from activities that are environmentally unsound or that the indigenous people concerned consider to be socially and culturally inappropriate. The term "lands" is understood to include the environment of the areas which the people concerned traditionally occupy.

9.7. Countries should increase information and training on conservation practices and foster the creation of sustainable off-farm rural employment opportunities in order to limit the further expansion of human settlements to areas with fragile ecosystems.

[9.7.bis Population distribution policies must be consistent with such international instruments as the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), wherein Article 49 prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers from an occupied territory and forbids the occupier from transferring parts of its own population into the territory it occupies.]

B. Population growth in large urban agglomerations

Basis for action

9.8. In many countries, the urban system is characterized by the overwhelming preponderance of a single major city or agglomeration. The tendency towards population concentration, fostered by the concentration of public and private resources in some cities, has also contributed to the rising number and size of mega-cities. In 1992, there were 13 cities with at least 10 million inhabitants and their number is expected to double by 2010, when most mega-cities will be located in the developing countries. The continued concentration of population in primate cities and in mega-cities in particular poses specific economic, social and environmental challenges for Governments. Yet, large agglomerations also represent the most dynamic centres of economic and cultural activity in many countries. It is therefore essential that the specific problems of large cities be analysed and addressed, in full awareness of the positive contribution that large cities make to national economic and social development. The challenges faced by cities are often exacerbated by weak management capacities at the local level to address the consequences of population concentration, socio-economic development, environmental impacts and their interrelations.

Objective

9.9. The objective is to enhance the management of urban agglomerations through more participatory and resource-conscious planning and management, review and revise the policies and mechanisms that contribute to the excessive concentration of population in large cities, and improve the security and quality of life of both rural and urban low-income residents.

Actions

9.10. Governments should increase the capacity and competence of city and municipal authorities to manage urban development, to safeguard the environment, to respond to the needs of all citizens, including urban squatters, for personal safety, basic infrastructure and services, to eliminate health and social problems, including problems of drugs and criminality, and problems resulting from overcrowding and disasters, and to provide people with alternatives to living in areas prone to natural and man-made disasters.

9.11. In order to improve the plight of the urban poor, many of whom work in the informal sector of the economy, Governments are urged to promote the integration of migrants from rural areas and to develop and improve their income-earning capability by facilitating their access to employment, credit, production, marketing opportunities, basic education, health services, vocational training and transportation, with special attention to the situation of women workers and women heads of households. Child-care centres should be established, and special protection and rehabilitation programmes should be established for street children.

9.12. To finance the needed infrastructure and services in a balanced manner, taking into account the interests of the poor segments of society, local and national government agencies should consider introducing equitable cost-recovery schemes and increasing revenues by appropriate measures.

9.12.bis Governments should strengthen the capacity for land management, including urban planning at all levels in order to take into account demographic trends and encourage the search for innovative approaches to address the challenges facing cities, with special attention to the pressures and needs resulting from the growth of their populations.

9.12.ter Governments should promote the development and implementation of effective environmental management strategies for urban agglomerations, giving special attention to water, waste and air management, as well as to environmentally sound energy and transport systems.

C. Internally displaced persons

Basis for action

9.13. During the past decade, awareness about the situation of persons who are forced to leave their places of usual residence for a variety of reasons has been rising. Because there is no single definition of internally displaced persons, estimates of their number vary, as do the causes for their migration. However, it is generally accepted that those causes range from environmental degradation to natural disasters and internal conflicts that destroy human settlements and force people to flee from one area of the country to another. Indigenous people in particular are in many cases subject to displacement. Given the forced nature of their movement, internally displaced persons often find themselves in particularly vulnerable situations, especially women who may be subjected to rape and sexual assault in situations of armed conflict.

Internal displacement is often a precursor to outflows of refugees and externally displaced persons. Returning refugees may also be internally displaced.

Objective

9.14. The objectives are:

(a) To offer adequate protection and assistance to persons displaced within their country, particularly women, children and the elderly, who are the most vulnerable, and to find solutions to the root causes of their displacement in view of preventing it and, when appropriate, to facilitate return or resettlement;

(b) To put an end to all forms of forced migration, including "ethnic cleansing".

Actions

9.15. Countries should address the causes of internal displacement, including environmental degradation, natural disasters, armed conflict and forced resettlement, and establish the necessary mechanisms to protect and assist displaced persons, including, where possible, compensation for damages, especially those who are not able to return to their normal place of residence in the short term. Adequate capacities for disaster preparedness should be developed. The United Nations, through dialogue with Governments and all intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, is encouraged to continue to review the need for protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, the root causes of internal displacement, prevention and long-term solutions, taking into account specific situations.

9.16. Measures should be taken to ensure that internally displaced persons receive basic education, employment opportunities, vocational training and basic health-care services, including [reproductive health services and family planning].

9.17. In order to reverse declining environmental quality and minimize conflict over access to grazing land, the modernization of the pastoralist economic system should be pursued, with assistance provided as necessary through bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

9.17.bis Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to strengthen development assistance for internally displaced persons so that they can return to their places of origin.

[9.18. Measures should be taken, nationally and internationally, to find lasting solutions to questions related to internally displaced persons, including their right to voluntary and safe return to their home of origin.]